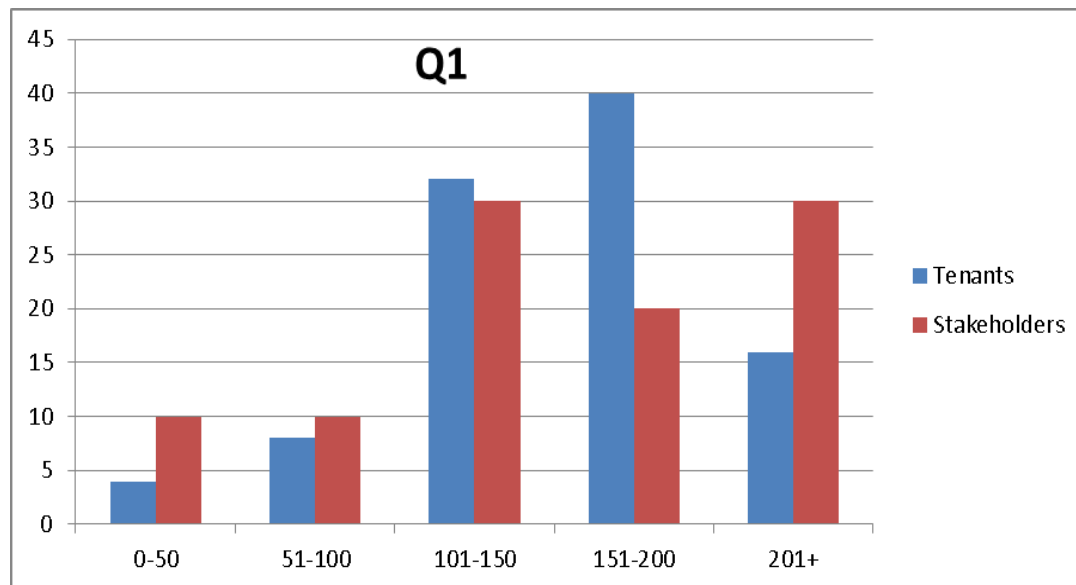


## Questionnaire Responses

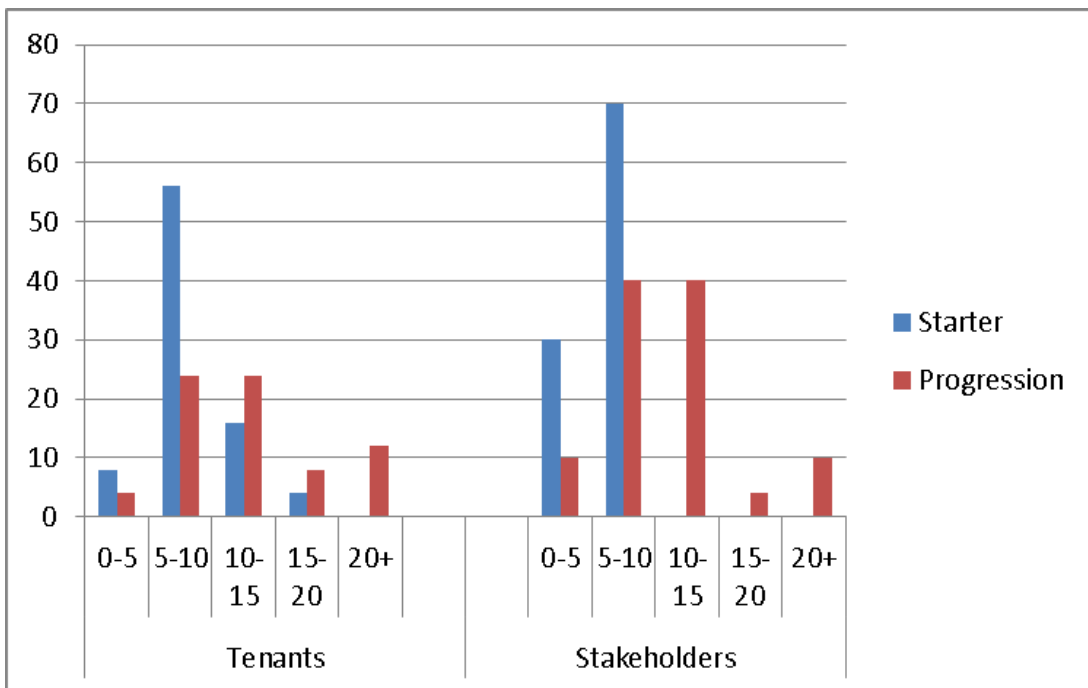
### Stakeholders

Q1 What minimum size acreage do you consider to be a viable unit in order to make a living off the holding?



**80% of stakeholders responding felt that the minimum size acreage to make a living from any smallholding would be greater than 100 acres. Indeed, 30% felt that 201+ acres should be the minimum size required. 64% of the Council's smallholdings are 100 acres or below. 40% of tenants thought 151 to 200 acres would be the minimum.**

Q2 What do you think is a suitable/appropriate length of tenancy for a starter holding and a progression holding and why?



**70% of stakeholders responding thought that starter tenancies should be 5 to 10 years in length. None indicated any greater length. However, 20% of tenants responding felt that starter tenancies should be over 10 years. Over 60% of tenants, however, though the tenancies should be up to 10 years with the vast majority indicating a length of 5 – 10 years.**

Q3 What do you think are the barriers to progression?

**Significant themes occurring in stakeholder responses to this question were:-**

**The lack of availability of larger farms for rent, including progression units within the Council estate, to which tenant farmers could move. Some respondents felt that there were opportunities for aspiring farmers to get on the ladder, for instance through 'starter' units, it was difficult to move further up the ladder. Reasons highlighted included difficulties obtaining sufficient finance/capital to progress as well as few opportunities in the market. The poor profitability of smaller starter farms was a recurring theme which linked to the inability to raise finance to move caused by the lack of scale or the need for more intensive farming (such as poultry or horticulture). It was also asserted that changes to farming meant modern farmers required business skills aside from the practical skills. Some respondents suggested closer working with private estates to support the move on of tenants.**

Q4 Do you think that there are other or better means of entry into farming other than through council smallholdings, please expand?

Q4	Yes	No
%age	40	40

**Stakeholders were equally split in their response to this yes/no question.**

**Respondents who replied 'yes' highlighted that other routes of entering farming existed through e.g. apprenticeships, employment, share farming and contracting were amongst the range of examples. Changes in the sector were identified (for instance consolidation and modernisation) as making smallholdings less relevant and the skills required for farming could be better learnt through these other routes rather than through smallholdings. Some respondents questioned why the Council had a role in providing entry into farming in particular and it was also suggested that if the Council withdrew it would not necessarily mean the end of tenancy opportunities or opportunities for progression.**

**Respondents who replied 'no' argued that Council tenancies gave a secure and affordable route into farming and were a primary route for entrepreneurial aspiring farmers, outside the industry, to come in. the private sector was not seen as providing sufficient opportunities or security. One respondent highlighted that despite holding only 3% of the land area and comprising less than 3% of the tenancy sector, county farms accounted for 36% of all new fully equipped holding agreements. Other options for entry were 'limited'.**

Q5 How do you consider the smallholdings support and assist the aspirations of the young farming community?

**A number of respondents highlighted that smallholdings provided an opportunity for young people to enter farming and that bringing younger farmers into the sector was important, particularly due to the 'older' age profile of farmers currently and the need to respond to significant changes in the farming economy internationally. Younger farmers should be enabled to innovate and achieve their aspirations and currently there were few other routes. Smallholdings were an 'important part' of the community.**

**On the other side of the argument some respondents did not feel that smallholdings assisted young people to progress and were at risk of giving false hope to young entrants that they can progress or create a viable business. Those who did succeed were seen as the exception rather than the rule and others who enter through smallholdings could be put off farming after being saddled with unviable farms and no ability of progressing. Changes in the farming sector meant smallholdings were less relevant and the direction of the UK agricultural sector was not towards farmers running their own independent businesses.**

Q6a How do you consider that Council smallholdings contribute to the economy and countryside?

**Some respondents argued that Council smallholdings contributed only in the same way as any other small farm and did not contribute in any meaningful sense. Against an intention of encouraging new businesses and creating economic growth others doubted that the current system delivered and would have minimal impact on local employment and the generation of income to a local area.**

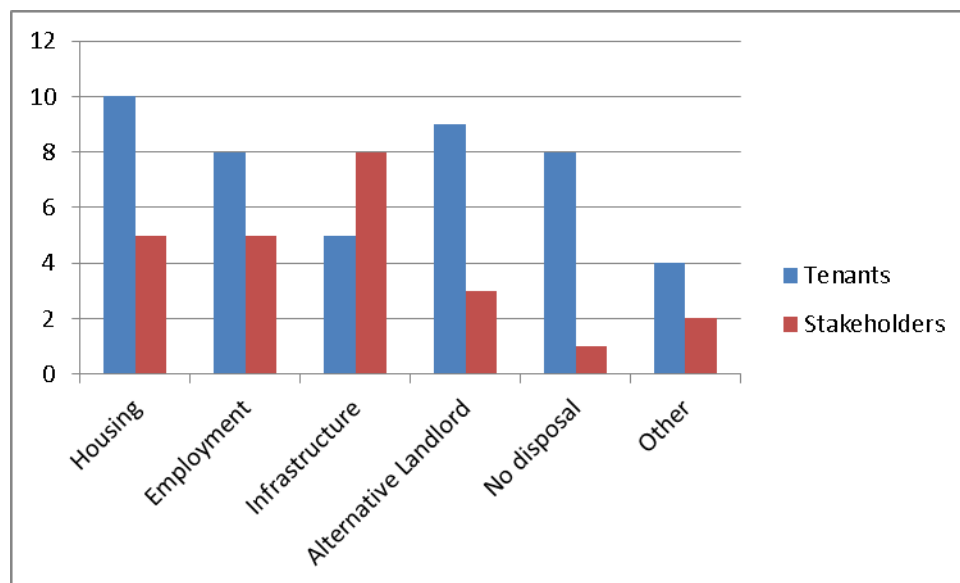
**Alternative arguments put forward highlighted the idea of smallholdings nurturing new businesses and economic growth for 'thriving' local communities. Smallholdings 'traded' with local businesses (30 local businesses in a study of 2 Herefordshire holdings) but there was no assertion that this was unique to County smallholdings. Another respondent suggested that Environmental Stewardship helped sustain the countryside and if well managed, could provide 'income' to the Council.**

Q6b Do you consider that private sector landlords contribute to the same extent as Council smallholdings?

**Stakeholders responding 'no' broadly argued that private landlords offered limited opportunities, especially for new entrants, preferring instead existing tenants or experienced farmers who were known to them. Higher rents were highlighted as an issue although it was acknowledged that some try to support progression. Private sector landlords maybe focussed more on the 'short term'.**

**Other respondents argued that Private Sector Landlords would contribute more as they were able to invest better in the land asset and were able to take more risks by supporting new or emerging enterprises or using alternative agreements as well as traditional tenancies. Although maybe more for existing or experienced farmers they could create viable businesses for aspiring farmers through joint ventures and profit sharing and provided more scope for entrepreneurial activities.**

Q7 Would you support the disposal of any of the smallholdings land and/or buildings for the following purposes?



This question sought to gauge the level of support for disposal and included the option of 'No Disposal'.

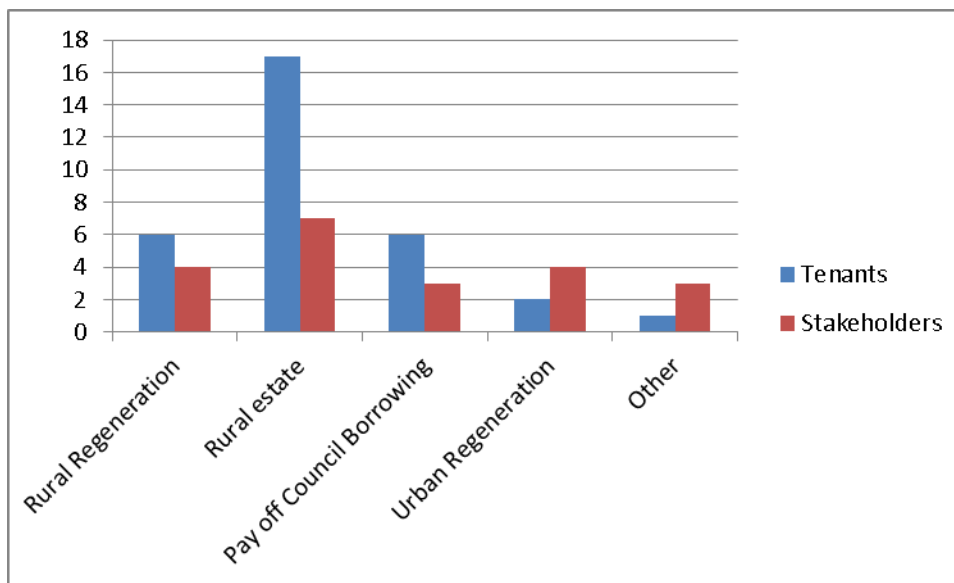
The majority of Stakeholders identified Infrastructure as the highest priority for funding in the event of the sale of any of the smallholdings with Housing and Employment joint second. Only one respondent ticked 'no disposal'.

The comments received in response to the question diverged on the question of disposal roughly equally although most supported, as least some disposal.

The responses in favour of disposal ranged from supporting outright disposal for the purpose of using the capital receipt in support of other priorities through to utilising at least a proportion of the receipt towards reinvesting in the smallholdings estate or buying land to expand the estate. Achieving best price through development and marriage values was a strong theme as was the idea of doing so through a carefully managed strategic asset plan towards the goal of supporting other corporate priorities.

One respondent highlighted the Grade A quality of the smallholding land as requiring protecting and another suggested using windfall receipts to benefit the whole estate. However, the majority of stakeholders appeared to lean towards a carefully managed disposal of all or some of the estate, the views on use diverging.

Q8 How do you consider any capital raised from any disposal should be spent?



Stakeholders were then invited to highlight which, of 5 choices, should be the focus of any Capital released through any disposal. One third of respondents appeared to support utilising receipts towards the rural estate. Of these, one respondent reinforced the need for the Council solely to maintain the estate for future generations others argued in favour of using capital from any partial disposals to enhance or even grow the estate. Supporting economic growth and stability and rural social and economic regeneration were also highlighted but in summary 2 thirds of respondents highlighted other priorities than investing in the rural estate, for the use of any receipt. Amongst these some put the argument that the smallholdings should be regarded just like any Council asset and should not be ring-fenced or protected.

Q9 How do you implement best practice in rural estate and sustainable countryside management?

Amongst stakeholders the strongest theme in the responses were in the negative, with answers ranging from a straight no and assertions that Council-owned smallholdings were out of kilter with modern farming and less relevant to CAP/EU mechanisms to more nuanced suggestions that Herefordshire could learn from other LA's and private estates in terms of best practice. It was also argued that County smallholdings did not implement best practice in any special way compared to other smallholdings.

Arguments were put forward regarding the potential for County smallholdings to demonstrate good practice through, for instance, the sustainable management of hedgerows. One argument proffered that there were opportunities for solar photo-voltaic and bio-mass schemes and that Herefordshire should ensure this happens

Q10 How do you think the smallholdings can contribute to renewable energy obligations and please include any barriers or problems?

**Respondents to this question most generally listed a number of features of renewable energy that smallholdings could contribute to including biofuel, solar and wind power with buildings and land providing opportunities for e.g. PV arrays. However, a number of respondents highlighted the difficulties tenants would face in terms of financing schemes of sufficient size particularly bearing in mind the withdrawal of many subsidies.**

Q11 How do you think the community is involved in the smallholdings

**Answers were broadly split three ways with broadly equal numbers claiming either a) County Smallholdings did not (or in one response, should not) involve the community or, b) did involve the community (social interaction, purchasing local produce and encouraging school visits) and c) offering ideas on what smallholdings could be doing to involve the community. These included suggesting they could encourage school visits, raising awareness of the estate. Overall, therefore, approximately one-third of respondents argued that County smallholdings made a contribution.**

Q12 Do you agree that the tenants should have the opportunity to buy their farm at open market value, with individual sales assessed on a farm by farm basis, and conditional on the impact on any wider estate policy?

Q12	Yes	No
% age	50	40

**A small majority of respondents indicated agreement with the question as posed, however the written responses were more nuanced. Some suggested that a sale to the tenant should be conditional upon achieving financial best value and with regard to the impact on the rest of the estate. A continued theme from earlier questions was that reinvestment in the estate should be a priority for the use of any monies released. The TFA argued for the farms to remain in the tenanted sector and that they could generate funds for front-line services. It was argued elsewhere in the responses that smallholdings did/could generate a profit and that cashing-in the estate as a quick fix would lose longer term benefits such as capital growth although, contrary to this argument, there was no suggestion that such Capital growth could ever be released. One respondent highlighted higher returns on rent per hectare being achieved in Staffordshire of 30%.**

Q13 Do you believe that a Private Sector Landlord can deliver similar or improved outcomes for the Smallholdings Tenants?

Q13	Yes	No
% age	30	50

**Narrative comments broadly reflected the proportions of 'yes' and 'no' responses to this question. Those responding positively argued either that the sector needed both Private and County landlords or suggested that private sector landlords could better invest or take risks in supporting new entrepreneurial enterprises or working arrangements than County smallholdings. However, in contrast to this respondents highlighted issues such as less security for tenants, fewer opportunities for new entrants to farming and higher rents as being risks associated with private sector ownership. However, one respondent did suggest that other smallholding Counties ran profitable estates and were keen to take on the management of other County estates.**

Q14 Any other comments?

- Small holdings were in tune with the farming systems pre 1980. The farming sector has changed dramatically over the past 30 years and smallholdings no longer have a role to play. In my opinion they provide young farmers a false hope that this is a means to entering the farming industry. The Council has significant demands for capital expenditure and must ensure that its capital assets are used to support the key priorities.
- The council estate is a valuable resource, to the development not sold off like the family silver.
- Council smallholding estates play a significant part in a much wider farming industry picture. I have experienced many more successes than failures with tenants coming from council holdings. They are extremely important!
- It is often the case that new entrants are willing to combine other economic activities with farming and therefore the question about minimum farm size (question one) is not entirely appropriate. We have answered on the basis of the question asked but would suggest the small farms are appropriate for a local authority for a local authority was happy to allow applicants to combine other economic activities with farming.
- Engagement with a wider network of national organisations with an interest in the sector is a means of improving knowledge of opportunities to manage the estate more pro-actively than has been done to date. Staffordshire introduced a rationalisation and investment programme after their 2007/2008 review and as a result they have a stock of better equipped farms. While fewer in number, they provide new entrants with a real chance of success and progression. This policy does not diminish overall value of the estate as very little land is being sold. The policy has also helped to retain the agricultural character of the county for wider economic benefit.